

*January 6, 2010*

## **New Oil and Gas Policy Fact Sheet**

- The BLM is announcing a series of steps that will ensure environmental protection of important natural resources on BLM lands while at the same time aiding in orderly leasing and development of oil and gas resources.
- First, the BLM is issuing a new draft oil and gas leasing policy for agency review that will require:
  - A more detailed environmental review prior to leasing oil and natural gas resources.
  - The BLM to engage the public in the development of Master Leasing and Development Plans prior to leasing areas where intensive new oil and gas development is anticipated. The intent is to fully consider other important natural resource values prior to making an irreversible commitment to develop an area.
  - A comprehensive parcel review process that takes a site-specific approach to individual lease sales. Each potential lease sale will undergo increased internal and external coordination, public participation, interdisciplinary review of available information, confirmation of Resource Management Plan (RMP) conformance, and national, state, and local guidance, as well as site visits to parcels when necessary to supplement or validate existing data. State Office quarterly lease sales would still occur as required by law; however, the BLM anticipates that process time frames will be extended to accommodate the interdisciplinary review of lease sale parcels.
  - Provide opportunity for more public participation and better environmental documentation, which in turn is expected to reduce the number of protests filed as well as enhance the State Offices' ability to resolve protests prior to lease sales.
- Second, the BLM is issuing interim draft guidance to its Field Offices on the implementation of Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which established five categorical exclusions (CXs) to streamline the environmental review process for permitting of certain oil and gas exploration and development activities.
  - Under NEPA, federal agencies may use CXs to approve projects on federal land without conducting extensive environmental reviews if the agency determines the projects will not have significant environmental impacts.
  - The draft guidance being issued today will establish a process for considering "extraordinary circumstances" when using a Section 390 CX. Extraordinary

circumstances occur when individual actions that normally would be categorically excluded are of such a nature or degree that they warrant further environmental analysis before permitting.